

UNITED KINGDOM

British police try deterring pro-lifers with continuous investigations

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“The process is the punishment. It’s very frustrating because it’s used to deter others. The police seem so confused about the law.” Speaking to the *Daily Compass*, Isabel Vaughan-Spruce shares a few off the cuff thoughts on the recent news that she is being

investigated for the third time by West Midlands Police for silently praying outside an abortion clinic in Birmingham. This is the latest of a series of controversial actions by the British police force against pro-life supporters in the UK. Meanwhile, real crime is on the rise in British cities to the point that the [Annual Crime Survey for England and Wales](#) published in January 2025, shows that public confidence in the police force has fallen to an all-time low. The particularly zealous policing of solitary, peaceful citizens engaged in silent prayer is seen as yet another example of 'two-tier policing'. The survey shows that citizens are calling, above all, for a neighbourhood police force that fights dangerous crime and ensures safer neighbourhoods in which to live and raise children.

Primarily, the police investigation appears incomprehensible because Britain's most famous Catholic pro-life campaigner, has already received a payout and an apology from West Midlands Police for wrongful arrest on two occasions. And having been vindicated multiple times, Vaughan-Spruce has continued to pray silently near the abortion clinic weekly. However, she claims that police officers continue to watch her and, on several occasions, have approached her to ask if she is praying silently in her head. Officers have asked her to leave but can't provide a legal reason to justify their request.

On this basis, she lodged a formal complaint against the police force earlier this year, claiming that she was still being subjected to regular harassment by officers for silently praying, and accusing them of attempting to restrict her freedom of expression. Much to her surprise, she received a letter from the force's Department for Professional Standards stating that they could not deal with the complaint because she was the subject of an ongoing 'live investigation', which she was not aware of. West Midlands Police also stated that officers were liaising with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) to assess whether there was enough evidence to charge her. However, despite three requests for a formal response, the latest of which was due on 11 August, Vaughan-Spruce still does not know the outcome of the West Midlands Police investigation seven months later.

"Despite being fully vindicated multiple times after being wrongfully arrested for my thoughts, it's unbelievable that two and a half years later, I am still being harassed by police for silently praying in that area, and yet again find myself under investigation for the same prayers I have said for twenty years. "Silent prayer cannot possibly be a crime

– everyone has the right to freedom of thought,” Vaughan-Spruce told the *Daily Compass*.

Ms Vaughan-Spruce was **arrested for the first time** by two police officers for silently praying in a 'buffer zone' around a closed abortion clinic in the Kings Norton area of Birmingham, back in November 2022. At the time, she informed the police officers that she was not protesting and explained, “I might be praying in my head, but I haven't said anything out loud.” The **video of her arrest** went viral and provoked an international outcry. When the case went to court, in February 2023, the prosecution was unable to provide evidence that the silent prayer going through her mind amounted to a criminal offence. Vaughan-Spruce was acquitted of all charges at Birmingham Magistrates' Court.

Nonetheless, several weeks later, Vaughan-Spruce was arrested again by officers who informed her that engaging in silent prayer within the restricted zone was a crime. Her legal team at Alliance Defending Freedom UK **dubbed** her case “the first ‘thoughtcrime’ prosecution in 21st century Britain”. A costly six-month police investigation followed leading to charges being dropped for the second time. Last August, she received a **payout of £13,000 and an apology** from the police force “in acknowledgement of her unjust treatment and the breach of her human rights”.

In October 2024, the law changed making it a criminal offence to do anything that intentionally or recklessly influences a person’s decision to use abortion services, obstructs them, or causes harassment, alarm or distress to someone using or working at the premises within 150 metres. Ms Vaughan-Spruce, however, has continued to pray silently outside the abortion clinic in Birmingham. She told the *Daily Compass*, “the women entering and leaving the clinic who walk past her have no idea who she is and don’t even notice her. I’m just a woman standing looking at her phone to them”. However, the West Midlands Police stated in their letter, “We are currently investigating allegations that a 48-year-old woman has interfered with access to or provision of abortion services between January and July this year.

The UK’s persecution and prosecution of pro-lifers for silent prayer has often made international headlines. Notably, it attracted the attention of the Trump administration

with Vice President JD Vance, famously [denouncing restrictions on freedom of expression](#) in Britain and elsewhere in [his speech](#) at the Munich Security Council conference in last February. In March, a team of US officials were sent to the UK to investigate concerns over freedom of speech restriction. During their mission, they met five British pro-life activists who had been arrested for praying silently near abortion clinics: Isabel Vaughan-Spruce, [Adam Smith-Connor](#), the veteran arrested for praying near a clinic in Bournemouth; Catholic priest [Father Sean Gough](#) arrested in Birmingham; [Livia Tossici-Bolt](#), arrested for silently holding a sign reading “Here to talk, if you want” in Bournemouth; and Rose Docherty, the 74-year-old grandmother arrested outside Glasgow’s Queen Elizabeth University Hospital.

The unprecedented step of sending a team of US officials to the UK to investigate concerns over restrictions to freedom of speech has given the pro-lifers hope and could be bearing fruit.

Recently, prosecutors [dropped the case against Rose Docherty](#). Now time will tell if the same outcome will be reached in the cases of Smith-Connor, whose appeal, scheduled to begin on 28 July, was postponed indefinitely; Livia Tossici-Bolt, who is also waiting for the date of her appeal; and Ms Vaughan-Spruce, who is awaiting information on the outcome of her investigation.